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ABSTRACT

The Third World Assembly of Adult Education held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, November 24-30, 1985, brought 450 adult educators from 90 countries together to discuss the theme adult education, development, and peace. The week-long conference mixed morning general sessions with 17 intensive work groups. The first work group searched for common national themes in adult civic education, and the second general session brought together representatives from civic education programs in various countries throughout the world. The practices and problems of popular education in the Third World were explored with particular emphasis on Latin America and Freire's views on social action through adult education. Distinctions were drawn betweeen formal, nonformal, and informal adult civic education. Next, participants from developed nations explained their national programs for adult civil education. Popular participation was determined to be the essential ingredient in the development of adult civic education. According to the five guiding principles for adult civic education that were developed at the end of the conference, adult civic (popular) education should (1) be integrated with existing popular movements, (2) enable citizens to develop their capacities for political participation on an informed basis, and (3) enhance the interrelationship between teaching and practice (participation and action); furthermore, (4) adult (popular) educators should be personally neutral, and (5) the social, political, economic, and cultural distinctions in national approaches to adult civic education should be recognized. (MN)

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THE THIRD WORLD IS A DIFFERENT WORLD

by

Leonard P. Oliver

August 28, 1986

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Dr. Leonard P. Oliver directs Oliver Associates, Washington, D.C. He is also Staff Associate of the Kettering Foundation of Dayton, Ohio. In November, 1985, Dr. Oliver attended the World Assembly of Adult Education in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and chaired the Work Group on Adult Civic Education. This paper represents his report on the Assembly.

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THE THIRD WORLD IS A DIFFERENT WORLD

The Third World Assembly of Adult Education, held in Buenos Aires, Argentina from Sunday, November 24, to Saturday, November 30, 1985 brought together 450 adult educators from 90 countries on the theme: "Adult Education, Development, and Peace."

Sponsoring organizations included the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE),* The Latin American Council for Adult Education (CEAAL), The Argentine Council for Popular Education, and The Argentine Ministry of Education and Justice. Prior ICAE-initiated World Assemblies were held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1976), Helsinki (1979), and Paris (1982). The Buenos Aires Assembly was the first time adult educators from around the world had met in Latin America.

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* The ICAE, headquartered in Toronto, was formed in 1973 to create a communications link among adult educators worldwide. ICAE's functions are information, research, advocacy, and training on behalf of its 90 member states.

The week-long World Assembly mixed morning general sessions (with simultaneous translation using portable headsets into English, Spanish, and French) with 17 intensive "Work Groups" representing the diversity of adult education (from literacy and labor education and education in prisons to the history of adult education and participatory research). Budd Hall, Secretary-General of the ICAE, asked me to chair a new Work Group on Adult Civic Education based on my work with the Kettering Foundation and its civic education interests. For our evenings, our Argentine hosts arranged a series of participatory cultural activities — a "popular education and cultural fair" with indigenous theater, music, and dance.

The Argentine Context

The election of a middle-of-the-road, small-town lawyer named Raul Alfonsin in 1983 as President of Argentina marked the end of a century of military and civilian dictatorships. President Alfonsin spoke to the

adult educators' concerns when he warmly opened the World Assembly on Monday morning by declaring that

> Each time we stop growing with education, each time we yield in our efforts, the scourges of illiteracy reappear, the creative levels of society diminish, and, consequently, democracy itself, as a political system, is cornered.... It is not a question of just informing people, but of including them in society and in democracy.

Alfonsin talked about "the right to employment, the right to participate, and the right to dissent," observing that "a meeting of this nature, talking about adult education and democracy, could never have been held in the years of the dictatorship." Alfonsin's theme was exemplified by the plethora of outspoken representatives of Argentine "popular education" groups, most working underground in opposition to the dictatorship before 1983, and only recently able to speak out on public issues.

My Argentine friends pointed out to me often during the week just how fragile their democracy is. "Argentines like order," said Jorge Jaroslavsky of COPEDE (Commission for the Defense of Education), my Argentine counterpart in the Work Group, "and they'll sacrifice democracy

overnight to get it." Thus, the Argentines, fresh to democracy, carry its symbols down to explicitly sharing the dinner check with: "No, we all pay our way -- that's democracy."

The Significance of Paulo Friere to the Assembly

Many adult educators in the United States are conversant with the writings of Paulo Friere, brilliant Brazilian activist-priest-author -- who has deeply influenced our ideas about adult education and social action -- the use of adult education as an instrument of social transformation to assist adults to change their way of thinking about their society, their place in it, and their social/political conditions.

We read Friere, we teach Friere, we talk Friere. In the Third World, adult educators practice Friere. They believe in adults being active participants in the process of their own education. And Friere, president of CEAAL and a guiding force in the planning for the World Assembly, remained a presence throughout the deliberations even though

physically unable to attend. My Work Group on Adult Civic Education was no exception -- adult civic education starts with the individual citizen and is a means to citizen empowerment in organizational and public life.

Getting the Work Groups Started

Participants chose one Work Group for the entire week, and were instructed to use popular education methods (highly participatory, learning by involvement, group consensus, reporting results). The Work Groups met every afternoon beginning Monday, reporting back their results on the daily assignment: "where are we," "where we are going," and "plans of action" for attaining the goals. It almost worked this way.

A Search for Common National Themes in Adult Civic Education

In our Work Group, we had to confront from the start differences in perceptions about adult civic education and how it is practiced in highly

industrialized countries and in the Third World. On Monday afternoon as soon as we began offering program examples of adult civic education from our experiences in the United States, Japan, Germany, and France, we realized that we were really speaking about civic education for the middle- and upper-middle-classes -- a reasonably educated public. In the Third World countries represented (Argentina, Peru, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Iraq, and Sri Lanka), adult civic education is synonymous with "popular education" -- used by the various popular social movements to empower that segment of their adult populations with no previous voice in their governments. Sweden's folk high schools and study circles, subsidized in part by the government and sponsored by its "popular movements," reached both populations. Unfortunately, Professor Girgin Girginov of Bulgaria, the other country in the Work Group, had his translator read a long statement in English on how everything the state does in Bulgaria is concerned with the "adult education of the civic population" -- a conscious twist on our definition. Girginov referred to "formal courses," "reading room clubs," "radio conferences," and other forms of

adult education in Bulgaria, but after his statement, he never reappeared in our Work Group. He had presented his official statement, without discussion, and was there to inform, not to learn.

Our final chore at the end of this awkward opening Work Group session was for Jaroslavsky and me to put together a brief report for the full Assembly. This progress report miraculously appeared that Monday evening in all three languages on "The Wall Newspaper," a daily summary of the Work Groups' progress. It also was the basis for our first brief report to the Tuesday morning general session.

A Contrast of Systems

This second general session brought together representatives of contrasting systems, and set the climate for the afternoon Work Groups. Adolfo Esquivel, Argentine Nobel Peace Prize-winning poet, talked movingly about the importance of popular education in "breaking down walls" between people and their government (seems the military

dictatorship in Argentina during the quadrennnial World Cup in soccer in 1978 constructed brick facades in the town of Rosario to resemble houses to mislead the foreign visitors. The poor living behind the walls subsequently pulled the walls down and used the bricks to build real houses). Esquivel triggered a standing ovation when he exclaimed that "liberation is directly related to education," and that "under an oligarchical system, with dominant classes, with no alternatives, popular education becomes an alternative."

Esquivel was followed by Alexandre Vladislavlev, of "ZNANIE" — a mass education program for the dissemination of popular and scientific knowledge in the Soviet Union. Vladislavlev, an engaging former hockey player, admitted that "two different social and economic systems competed in the world today," but that "there would be no victory with weapons." He decried "social pessimism," and thought "public opinion had to be created," closing to applause by saying that "the Soviet delegation has come in the spirit of cooperation among adult educators."

Our Work Group's Priorities

Esquivel and Vladislavlev's remarks, contrasting as they were, provided the stimulus to our Work Group's Tuesday afternoon session. On Monday, we struggled with contrasting definitions of adult civic education; the Tuesday session belonged to the Latins who emotionally lectured and lobbied at length for a definition that began with premises from Friere and popular education.

The Latins began by making distinctions in the forms of adult civic education used in the Third World, distinctions that are not part of our adult educators' lexicon.

Formal Adult Education — Sponsored by the government through formal educational institutions (e.g., a public school class teaching the Constitution, a government literacy class on partriotism and political institutions).

Non-Formal Adult Education -- Adult education linked to the state, perhaps subsidized by the state, but carried out through such institutions as the church, political parties, and the military (depends on lectures, seminars, courses, and publications, and essentially defends the existing social/political structure.)

Informal Adult Education -- Use of mass media, usually controlled by the government (TV, radio, newspapers, flyers offering no challenges to the existing structures).

The Latin representatives emphasized that non-formal and informal systems of adult education maintain and reinforce the existing social order; in contrast, "popular education" for the public (the "masses") advocates and prepares adults for social and political change, as Jaroslavsky put it, "democratization de la Sociedad" ("social democratization").

Formats for Popular Education

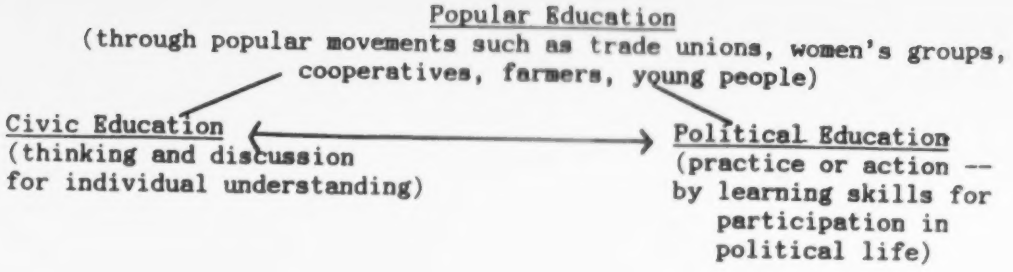
Formats and methodologies for popular education are informal and participant-centered -- small group discussions, neighborhood forums, no lectures or "experts." They are usually held when workers, farmers, housewives, and community workers have free time. Popular education is carried out primarily through the trade unions ("greminales"), farmers' groups ("compesinos"), and neighborhoods ("barrioles"). They often start with feeding people, providing them with medicine, shots, and physical examinations, or economic assistance. However they start, however the participants are attracted, the programs lead eventually to small group discussions or "study circles" on political affairs — "civic education." TV and newspapers tend not to be used — although single-issue oriented brochures, flyers, and pamphlets are widely circulated, and radio is used in rural areas. The aim of popular education is to create civic awareness through adult civic education, individual capacity-building for self-government — critical in building new national democratic systems, like the example emerging in Argentina.

Popular Education and Adult Civic Education

Much of our Tuesday afternoon discussion centered on popular education and social/political change. For example, Iraq's literacy director, Musari Al-Rawi, said: "It's impossible to change a social and political system without changing individuals who are a part of and responsible for that reality, and changing individuals and their capacity for effecting change is the responsibility of the adult civic educator."

Al-Rawi's comment, echoed by others, got us into the question of how popular education relates to adult civic education and civic action. Luis Carlos Gorriti, Director of the Peruvian National Association for Social Promotion and Development, emerged as the unofficial spokesperson for the Third World representatives in our Work Group and presented the scheme in Figure 1:

Figure 1


Popular Education
(through popular movements such as trade unions, women's groups, cooperatives, farmers, young people)
Civic Education
(thinking and discussion for individual understanding)
Political Education
(practice or action -- by learning skills for participation in political life)

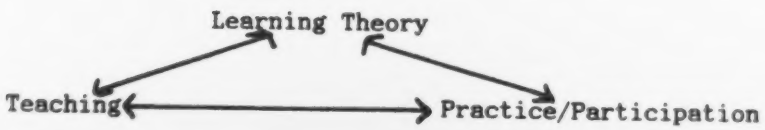
As Gorriti explained, "civic education" (understanding of institutions, government, society), and "political education" (learning the skills to influence institutions and government life — the action component) are complementary -- both vital aspects of popular education. In fact, civic education in this sense eventually leads the individual to popular education.

For Gorriti, civic education is "a moral attitude," not indoctrination, not propaganda, but based on the adult's need to find personal dignity, to participate, to contribute to social change. Used as a means for citizen understanding and citizen action, popular

education thus becomes a tool for change, for developing democratic systems, and for developing new indigenous leadership.

The Latins also emphasized the interdependence among adult education theory, teaching, and practice (Figure 2).

Figure 2



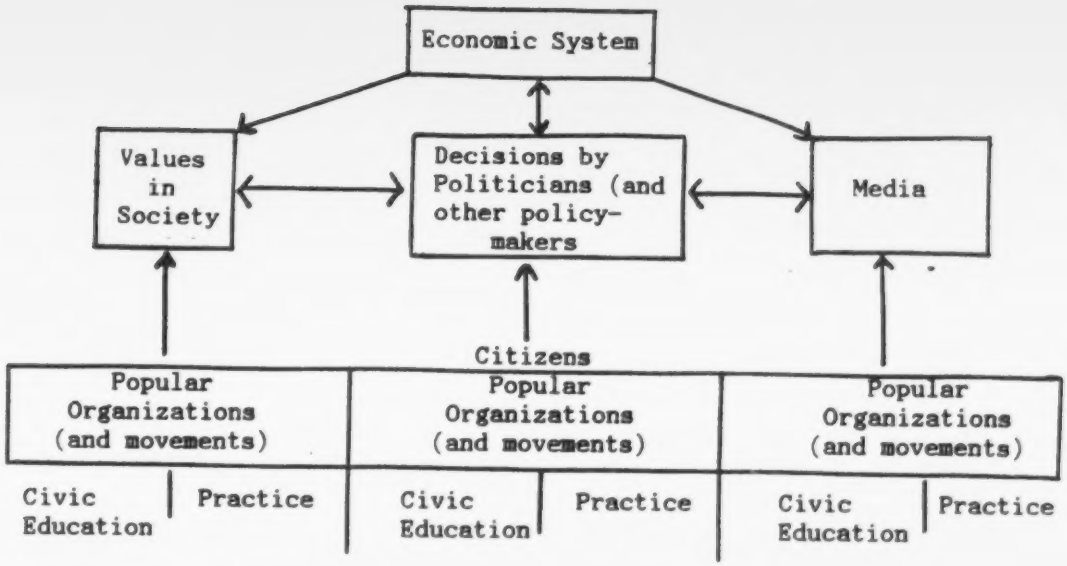
Learning Theory informs both teaching and practice (following John Dewey's admonition that "theory is more practical than practice because it expands alternatives for action"). Teaching emerges from theory and is preparation for practice. Ideally, teaching leads to practice; that is, participation, which in turn informs our teaching and tests our learning theory. Teaching adults through popular education, therefore, means finding ways for the adults to apply what they have learned.

Meaning for the Third World

Several Third World representatives and Peter Engberg of the Swedish Adult Education Federation linked popular education with the 1948 United Nations Universal Statement of Human Rights stressing education as a basic human right for personal dignity, human survival, and self-government. Engberg emphasized that non-governmentally sponsored informal adult education -- popular education — would always be in conflict with government-supported formal systems of education, and with government-controlled non-formal systems designed to socialize citizens and avoid mass organization, criticism and challenges to authority. If popular education were ever to be absorbed by the state, then it would no longer be popular education.

Engberg then schematicized the position and role of popular education in a developing society. His scheme for adult civic education may also have application in industrialized countries (Figure 3):

Figure 3



Engberg's basic argument is that the nature of a country's economic system (capitalism-socialism--mixed-state control) determines to a great extent a society's values, political decision-making process, and media role. In turn, political decisions are also influenced by the media and by a society's values, and these political decisions can have a direct bearing on what the media programs in our society think and in shaping public values. The one countervailing force, the "office of citizen," can have a dramatic effect on politics, the media, and social values --

if permitted free expression. We take such free expression (e.g., free press, voting, lobbying) for granted in the industrialized democracies, but Gorriti, Jaroslavsky, and other Third World representatives are still struggling to attain this goal.

The role of the popular organizations (e.g., churches, trade unions, cooperatives, farmers, women's groups) becomes critical in this process, as long as they have channels to communicate their views to policymakers and the media. All the popular organizations attempt to integrate the teaching of civic education, understanding issues and government, with the application of the knowledge, acting in the citizen role, thus linking education to action. Civic education in this sense encourages participation by community residents, neighborhood slum dwellers, farmers, cooperative members, and trade union members in the life of their organizations, their government, and society.

It was at this point in the discussion, with Engberg's paradigm as a guide, that the representatives from the industrialized nations began to find common ground with those from the Third World countries. The

moment transformed the Work Group from 11 separate countries and systems in the realization that in spite of different national economic, political, and cultural settings, democracy could only work with informed active citizens, and with politicians who recognized the value of citizen views. The institutions to carry out such civic education were as diverse as the countries represented — the Japanese "citizen halls" for public issue discussion, the U.S.'s Domestic Policy Association and the National Issues Forum, the Swedish study circles, the Sri Lankan Buddhist temple discussions with older people, or the popular education practices of the Third World.

Not everyone agreed. Bernard Smagghe, from France's People et Culture, refused to recognize the distinction between adult civic education and education in political skills because a middle-class, educated society already has these skills. Still, enough of us agreed that the distinction we had made between adult civic and political education should be the basis for our Work Group progress report to the Assembly Plenary Session on Wednesday morning. To allay the concerns of

some representatives from the developed nations, we agreed that different political and economic systems, and different levels of development, can generate and tolerate different forms of adult civic education.

Work Group Reports: "A Triumph of Imagination"

The daily "CARTE MUNDIAL" (World Assembly newsletter) carried the heading on Thursday, November 28: "Wednesday Plenary Session: A Triumph of Imagination." A conference planner's nightmare is to have 17 Work Groups report to a plenary session, let alone in 3 languages. It worked on Wednesday morning because the planners transformed the session into a televised newscast, with "newscasters" Thelma Abori (Uganda) and Phil Candy (Canada) going to five minute field summary reports (our Work Groups)interspersed with ads (lost camera, the evening cultural fair, changed luncheon plans) and the Buenos Aires weather report. Our Work Group report was received with courtesy and some mild applause, and our

Work Group participants acknowledged communication across cultural and language barriers.

Our Wednesday afternoon Work Group session was remarkably free of friction, almost anticlimactic, with the developed countries having the opportunity the Latins had on Tuesday -- to explain their national programs of adult civic education. I thought these national descriptions were influenced and tempered by the previous day's intense exchange over popular education. We moved into Thursday in high spirits -- the group was coming together. But we still had a difficult task — agreeing on a plan of action for adult civic education programs across 11 diverse countries.

The Thursday Plans of Action

The morning plenary session on Thursday focused on "popular participation" as the essential ingredient in the struggle to advance adult education. It was designed to stimulate our Work Groups to develop

"action plans." It brought together, among others, Sun Dongtang, of the Chinese Education Ministry, who reported 50 million adult Chinese at any one time participating in "highly organized" adult education programs; Adolfo Campo of the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education who talked about his country's adult literacy programs which are concerned with not just reading and writing but with political and economic education (popular education)*; and Peter Engberg of Sweden on the Swedish "study circles," a voluntary, democratic, participatory model of small group discussion that engages 2.9 million adult Swedes every year in 320,000 study circles. The model has been adopted in Tanzania, Nicaragua, and a number of developing countries. All centered on the popular education theme, and it became clear to our Work Group members that free and unfettered adult civic education was the key to furthering democratic principles and practices.

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* Compo's remarks brought some awkward moments for the U.S. Delegation. They included some bashing of the United States as an aggressor in Nicaragua, and he received a standing ovation. I believe many in the American contingent were uneasy or even ambivalent during this session. Some of us in discussions divorced ourselves as adult educators from official U.S. administration policy, some became defensive, almost apologetic, others defended our government's actions. Overall, we were well received as adult education colleagues, but matters that elicit intense feelings such as our Nicaraguan policy and the massive Third World debt burden raised emotional levels to the point where each of us had to respond as an individual -- in our own way.

Our Plan of Action for Adult Civic Education

Our charge by Thursday afternoon was to develop a "plan of action" for adult civic education worldwide, an impossible task for a new group with such strong feelings in national and cultural diversity.

I thought the Work Group had come a long way in simply recognizing that adult civic education would take on different characteristics in different countries and cultures and with different political and economic systems. We were even close to consensus on the value of the concept of popular education (and its civic/political education components) for industrialized democracies to enable citizens to develop a critical attitude towards public life, using adult education as a liberating process to empower citizens to challenge authority and participate in policy making at all governmental levels.

After listening to the interim reports of other Work Groups, some of which had been meeting together for a decade or more, I thought it would be premature to even try to develop an "action plan," given our tenuous agreement to recognize the value of popular education. Just to

take us as an example, common terms used extensively at the World Assembly such as "participatory education," "adult popular education and political economic class struggle," "education for self-determination," "political consciousness," and adult educators engaged in "communicating" -- not just communications -- although not foreign to us, still are not traditionally integrated in U.S. adult education teaching and practice.

The Work Group Report: Guiding Principles for Adult Civic Education

Unwilling to attempt to forge a consensus on a "plan of action" for adult civic education in such a diverse group, our Work Group participants fell back on basic principles of adult civic education -- where we thought we could find common ground. This would be our final report to the Assembly, and we selected Luis Gorriti (Peru) and Mabel Conesa (Argentina) as presenters.

Five basic principles emerged from our intense week-long deliberations:

(Link with Popular Movements)

1. Adult civic (popular) education should be integrated with existing popular movements (trade unions, cooperatives, community organizations, civic groups, farmers, etc.) which represent public, not special interests or governmental interests.

(Capacity Building)

2. Adult civic (popular) education should enable citizens to develop the capacity to participate politically on an informed basis in all social, political, and economic institutions -- governmental and non-governmental.

(Neutrality of the Adult Educator)

3. The adult civic (popular) educator should be personally neutral, and not impose his or her views or will on participants in adult civic education.

(National Cultural Distinctions)

4. We recognize social-political-economic and cultural distinctions in national approaches to adult civic education. In developing countries adult civic education is synonymous with popular education, and has to begin where the citizens are (feeding the hungry, providing basic health care, insuring economic survival), overcome states of dependency, and involving adults in decision making and political transformation to move towards a fully democratized society. The legitimacy of popular education in developing countries is based in people's legitimate aspirations for personal dignity, human survival, and self-government.

In developed countries, adult civic education serves to reinforce popular democracy by creating a broad base of informed and participating citizens, outside of special interests, who have a legitimate and recognized role in political decision making.

(Teaching-Practice)

5. Adult civic (popular) education's role is to enhance the interrelationship between teaching and practice (participation-action), to build adults' capacity to think freely and participate in decisions about their lives and their work, and to assist them in building community, challenging authority, and controlling their destiny.

Gorriti and Conesa spoke proudly and eloquently in their brief summary report to the plenary session on Friday morning, and on returning to his seat, Gorriti gave me an "embrazo" (a Latin form of hugging) which gave me my one truly emotional moment in a complex, demanding week.

A Reflection on The Work Group Process

Communication across 11 diverse nationalities and cultures and in 3 languages slowed our Work Group's progress, but the patient goodwill, sense of common purpose as adult educators, and recognized importance of adult civic education to both developing and industrialized nations kept

our 25 participants from diverging too far from our assigned task. We found some areas of agreement, and understood where we disagreed and why.

Each national representative had a distinct contribution to make and a distinct manner in making it. What stands out in retrospect is the Frenchman Bernard Smagghe who wanted to stick to "philosophie" and who started the week in a three-piece suit and wound up in our Work Group session without shoes or socks. Or Makoto Yamaguchi of Kanto Junior College in Japan who in her quiet, yet persevering way, supported and influenced our deliberations as she struggled with several languages. Or Iraq's Musari Al-Rawi who spoke eloquently of adult education and human growth. And Peter Engberg of Sweden, always contributing intellectually, always expanding our horizons as the Swedes love to do.

But it was the Latins, especially Luis Gorriti of Peru, Jorge Jaroslavsky of Argentina, and the ever-present local Argentine popular education activists who reached into our collective consciousness with eloquent pleas for linking adult civic education with popular education and with the legitimate people's movements for socio-political change and

economic development in their countries. They couldn't envision their democratic systems, some only a few years old, being sustained without popular education — civic and political. Perhaps because democratic values and institutions are so new to these educators, their faith in popular education as a means to sustain their fragile democratic systems is so intense, their commitment more a way of life than a job or career.

In the United States, we tend to become complaisant and lack vigilance regarding our cherished democratic institutions and practices. We exercise our traditional "right to indifference," especially at election time, but the World Assembly served as a timely reminder for all adult educators concerned with democratic social change that democracy can never be taken for granted, that adult educators have a historical and continuing obligation to use their resources in the service of an informed active participating citizenry, an active and lively public life, as the one way we can assure the continuance of our 200-year-old experiment in representative government-- kept accountable by popular democracy.

Only a few adult educators in the U.S. will see or pay attention to the reports emerging from the World Assembly. The Latin representatives, however, especially in private conversations, pointed out that they will use the Assembly reports to stimulate their popular education movements and give new emphasis to their autonomous social movements -- unions, cooperatives, farmers, neighborhood organizations -- which are often the only force in these countries capable of creating a new forum for popular participation. Latin social movements get their legitimacy from the people, create new distribution and political education networks, and are important because of the inadequacy of existing political organizations and their premise of redistributing power through civic education. As several Third World participants pointed out to me, "without the popular movements, popular education and civic education simply wouldn't exist."